



***NOAA Fisheries Service Accepts a Petition to Protect
Puget Sound Steelhead, Begins a Biological Review***

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The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service has accepted a Washington state citizen's petition to list Puget Sound steelhead under the federal Endangered Species Act, saying that the petition describes significant short- and long-term downward trends for steelhead in a wide range of rivers emptying into the sound.

Although acceptance of the petition doesn't guarantee that Puget Sound steelhead will ultimately be listed under the ESA, it does mean the fisheries agency will conduct its own full-scale biological review of the population and solicit public comment on the status of the stock.

NOAA Fisheries Service is an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

A final decision about whether to propose listing will be made by Sept. 13, the one-year anniversary of when NOAA Fisheries Service received the petition from Sam Wright of Olympia, Wash.

If Puget Sound steelhead are proposed for listing, the listing wouldn't become final until September 2006.

NOAA Fisheries Service last conducted a biological status review of Puget Sound steelhead in 1996. While the agency said at the time that a listing wasn't warranted, it said it was concerned about how healthy summer-run stocks of the fish were and about the harmful effects on wild steelhead of hatchery-reared steelhead.

The petition has new information that says there may be "significant interbreeding and competition" between hatchery and wild steelhead in spite of efforts by the state's Department of Fish and Wildlife, which operates the hatcheries, to isolate the two.

According to biologists, the salmon species known popularly as steelhead has the most complex life history of any Pacific salmon. If it remains a permanent freshwater resident, never traveling to the ocean, it's known as a rainbow trout. If it migrates to saltwater, it's called a steelhead, but it can spend up to seven years in freshwater before its trip to the Pacific, where it can remain for three years. And unlike any other Pacific salmon, it can spawn more than once. The offspring of steelhead can be rainbow trout; the offspring of rainbows can be steelhead.

For more details see the Web at: <http://www.nwr.noaa.gov/1salmon/salmesa/stlhpug.htm>

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